

The Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2017

The Problem: Seriously injured veterans and servicemembers cannot access adequate fertility services through the Departments of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Defense (DoD)

After more than a decade of war, thousands of servicemembers and veterans struggle with fertility and reproductive health. While VA and DoD offer some forms of fertility treatment and counseling, far too often they fail to meet the needs of these seriously injured servicemembers and veterans. Today, severely injured servicemembers are faced with the choice of pursuing these treatments before separation or paying tens of thousands of dollars out of pocket later. Severely injured veterans do not have a choice at all.

- DoD currently provides some *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) – the most popular and successful assisted reproductive technology (ART) today – but still excludes far too many servicemembers from eligibility for this and other treatments.
- VA has only temporary authority to provide care. In 2019, an outdated law will take away this vital treatment from veterans and their families.

Widespread use of improvised explosive devices and harsh deployment conditions have resulted in greater rates of genitourinary, blast, spinal, and brain injuries than in past conflicts. Beyond these physical wounds, mental health injuries can have equally detrimental effects on a servicemember or veteran's fertility and reproductive health.

The Solution: The Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2017

The **Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act of 2017** would expand VA and DoD's current fertility treatment and counseling offerings and empower severely injured servicemembers and veterans to start families when the time is right for them.

- *Expansion of treatment and care:* The Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act would lift VA's ART ban and expand ART treatments beyond DoD's current policy limitations.
- *Fertility treatment for spouses:* The Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act makes family members or gestational surrogates of a severely wounded veterans eligible for fertility treatment and associated reproductive health care services. For example, a male veteran may suffer spinal cord injuries that make it challenging to naturally fertilize an egg. Making spouses eligible for treatment would allow VA to provide the comprehensive care veterans and their families need to have a child.
- *Adoption assistance:* The Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act gives more options to veterans by allowing VA to provide financial assistance to severely wounded veterans who want to adopt children.
- *Child care services:* The Women Veterans and Families Health Services Act would make permanent the highly successful child care pilot program in VA, and expand it across the country. Child care is one of the most significant barriers to care for women veterans and younger veterans.